9886

A

DISSERTATION

ON THE

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION

ON

CIVIL SOCIETY.

ADDREST TO THE

PROVOST and SENIOR FELLOWS of Trinity College, Dublin;

AND

By them honoured with the first Premium for Composition offered by the University in the Year 1777.

By the Rev. JOHN ROBERT SCOTT, L.L. B. of T. C. D.

K

DUBLIN:
Printed by JOSEPH HILL.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DISSERTATION, &c.

THOSE perſons who have moſt accurately conſidered the powers, the energies, and the faculties of man, have from that conſideration been induced to conclude that he was, by the very frame of his nature, formed for ſociety: or (to ſpeak with the philoſopher) that he was * "naturally a political animal." His conſtitution and talents rendering him proper for this ſtate, his natural inclinations invited him to ſeek it out and fly from ſolitude, as the ſocial affections are the ſources of the pureſt enjoyments; and the neceſſity of his condition indicated its utility, and enforced its want in order to attain the means of bliſs, and even to ſecure the preſervation of being. The

* φύσει ζῶα πολίτικὰ.. Ariſtot. Polit. 3.

 inſufficiency

inſufficiency of each individual to procure his own happineſs, the juſt fears ariſing from the debility of the weak, and the vices of the wicked; from the want of power to repel injuries, and the want of virtue to annihilate them, ſoon pointed out to the conſiderate and the thoughtful the advantage of conjoined ſtrength to protect, the utility of joint efforts to promote, and the neceſſity of combined wiſdom to enſure the peace, the ſafety, and the bleſſings of life. Whilſt the domeſtic relation of parent and child demonſtrated the advantages of well ordered ſubordination, the abilities of the wiſe and of the good marked them out as objects of veneration, of eſteem, and of confidence. It readily occurred that their juſtice, their valour, their benevolence diffuſed felicity as wide as the ſphere of their influence extended: and, if happy was the family which reaped the fruits of their exertion, ſo much the more would that happineſs be encreaſed by multiplying its objects. How highly improved the lot of each would be, did he enjoy ſuch a parent, councellor, protector, it was obvious to remark: and what all were ſenſible that they wanted, all would be eager to endeavour to procure.

By

By ſuch reflections influenced, and by ſuch conſiderations induced, it is probable that mankind firſt entered into Society; in which private ſecurity was to be obtained by the eſtabliſhment and execution of equitable laws; publick tranquility by the defence againſt external invaſion afforded by common aid; and the general welfare ſupported, eſtabliſhed, ſtrengthened by the co-operation of ability and wiſdom, of ſagacity and fortitude, in the ſervice of the community. Civil Society thus ariſing from the wants, from the fears, and from the hopes of man; as it confeſſedly is attended with numerous advantages, (* "giving to him, who is by nature weak and de- "fenceleſs, an empire over other animals, and, in "ſome ſort, ſubduing the elements to his command; "remedying his diſeaſes, aſſiſting his old-age, comfort- "ing his ſorrows, and enduing him with ſuch forti- "tude as almoſt enables him to bid defiance to for- "tune") it may be thought by ſome well adapted,

* Hominem imbecillitas cingit. Nudum & infirmum Societas munit. Societas illi dominium omnium Animalium dedit: Societas terris genitum, in alienæ naturæ tranſmiſit imperium, & dominari etiam in mari juſſit. Hæc morborum impetus arcuit, ſenectuti adminacula proſpexit, ſolatia contra dolores dedit. Hæc fortes nos facit, quod licet contra fortunam advocare. Senec. de Benef. lib. 4. cap. 18.

in its moſt perfect form, to heal thoſe evils which it was invented to redreſs, and to verify thoſe hopes which it was adopted to realize. But that form has never in its naſcent ſtate, and ſeldom in any, been arrvied at; and, though the contrary had frequently happened, yet civil regimen is, in its own nature, utterly incapable, without ſome adventitious aid, of procuringt heſe ends, ſo ſalutary and ſo deſireable.

For as in a ſtate of nature the paſſions are ſubject to little controul, ſo alſo are they liable to few temptations; whilſt the eſtabliſhment of Society both inflames thoſe already exiſting, and gives birth to a new brood, though of a different complexion, yet of as horrid an aſpect. Since it is eſſential to the ends of civil community that the goods of fortune ſhould be unequally diſtributed, invidious diſtinctions, ſuperiour accommodations, and elegant refinements do from thence immediately ſpring, which rouſe the ſpirit of ambition, excite the thirſt of avarice, and enlarge the appetite of pleaſure. The law denouncing vengeance againſt all infractions on the peace or property of its ſubjects, the ſecret arts of miſchief are ſtudied and improved; and the ſubterfuges of craft are now the

reſource

reſource of the wicked to eſcape its puniſhments, to elude what they cannot oppoſe, and to obtain indirectly the objects of their deſires. Open injuſtice may, perhaps, be reſtrained by the dread of the magiſtrate; but ſecret crimes, though frequently more pernicious, and all the numerous offspring of hypocriſy, which, as the peſtilence, walketh in darkneſs, how ſhall he curb? Yet even iniquity avowed, and crimes unconcealed, in ſome caſes bid defiance to the reprehenſion of the ſtate; which never, conſiſtently with its end, can prohibit thoſe vices whoſe prohibition would eventually produce enormities more flagitious.

The welfare of the whole being the great object of Society, due attention to that object may alſo ſometimes produce a neglect of particulars: as neceſſity requires that, where their intereſts are incompatible, the latter ſhould ever give way to the former. By the wiſdom of the ſtate may the nobleſt ſchemes of publick polity be framed; but how ſhall that wiſdom prevent their execution from being rendered abortive by the machinations of the intereſted, the diſſolute, and the abandoned? The giant forms of rapine and violence may not, indeed, ſtalk at large through the

land; but how ſhall the inſect ſwarms of fraud, cunning, and deceit be prevented from overſpreading the community, and eating out its very vitals? Beſides many duties of the utmoſt importance to the eaſe, comfort, and ornament of ſocial life (ſuch as gratitude, generoſity, friendſhip, and benevolence) reject the cognizance of law, and reprobate the idea of compulſion: which would at once change their nature, nay even deſtroy their exiſtence. And, as common conſent alone is here ſuppoſed to have formed the federal union, without any other obligatory tie, the governed are bound to obedience but by a rope of ſand, which the firſt wave of popular diſcontent may be ſufficient to diſſolve, and to crumble into atoms the ſeveral parts of the confederacy almoſt as ſoon as it is formed. Thus impotent of itſelf is Society to prevent various ills, as pernicious in their conſequences as any which its eſtabliſhment was intended to prevent.

But notwithſtanding theſe defects are alike ſtriking and unavoidable, yet are they not remedileſs; the condition of man hopeleſs; nor has this lord of the creation been ſlightly provided with the means of happineſs by the ſupreme firſt cauſe of all things. For Religion is

at

at hand ready to aſſiſt the cauſe of Civil Society, well adapted to remedy its defects, to make up for its deficiencies, and to give to its orders, its decrees, and its ſanctions, ſtrength, ſtability, and ſupport. Enſuring to the magiſtrate the permanency of the State, and the obedience of the ſubject, from the ſolemn external tie of oaths, and to the people the unmoleſted enjoyment of their rights from the internal bond of conſcience by it impoſed; the bleſſings of ſecurity, of peace, and of order ſpontaneouſly ſpring from Civil Society: which thus, having laid its foundation on the broad baſis of publick utility and general good, at length hides its aſpiring head within the ſhadow of the throne of the Moſt High. Religion being now united, and, as it were, incorporated with Society mutual advantages to each flow from their union; as the former is enforced by the temporal puniſhments of vice and iniquity impoſed, for its own ſafety, by the latter; and it, in return, is more than doubly repaid for this ſervice by the efficacy of thoſe motives to action which the former makes known, eſtabliſhes, and applies.

For holding forth to the virtuous rewards of value immenſe and duration infinite, Society receives from this

this union that aid which its poverty prevented it from beſtowing on the deſerving; and which, from ignorance of the motives of human actions, it was incapacitated to beſtow with juſtice, had it even poſſeſſed the means of rewarding. The fear of divine puniſhment for villainy and vice, that firſt and firmeſt pillar of Society, now combining its force with theſe rewards, and operating in conjunction with civil ſanctions, the two grand principles of political community are called into action: thoſe principles of reward and puniſhment which all legiſlators, ſpeculative and practical, have ſeen to be eſſential to the well being of the ſtate, but which, without the aid of Religion, they have ever been unable effectually to eſtabliſh.

Indeed when the human mind is once thoroughly impreſſed with a due ſenſe of Religion, or of the exiſtence, attributes, and providence of the Eternal, ſentiments of duty ſupercede the neceſſity of civil ſanctions, and the virtues of the citizen ariſe from the character of the man. From his belief of an overruling providence he feels himſelf obliged to the duties

of (what moraliſts call) imperfect obligation, thoſe duties ſo eſſential to the comfort of life; whilſt thoſe actions which laws can neither reach, or ſufficiently enforce, are performed with promptitude and alacrity: having it ever impreſſed on his mind that the law was not made for a man of conſcience. As he is convinced that no crimes can be hidden from him to whom the ſecrets of all hearts are known, hypocriſy fraud, and deceit are baniſhed from his conduct, and his moſt private not leſs than his moſt publick actions conformed to the rules of infinite wiſdom, purity, and goodneſs. Called on to take a part in the buſy ſcenes of active life the dignity of his virtue ſheds a luſtre on the moſt exalted ſtation, whilſt his conſcientious diſcharge of its functions ſcatters bleſſings over the happy land: and in the calmer ſcenes of ſequeſtered retirement their milder radiance ſpreads around them a glory which illumens even the obſcurity of his retreat.

Such then being the influence of true Religion on the conduct of the individual, conceive, but for a moment, that influence extended through a whole community, directing its efforts, governing its mem-

 bers,

bers, and inſpiring, enlivening, animating its every energy, force, and power. The leaſt important effects which it muſt cauſe would be the attainment of every end for which Society was inſtituted, the participation of every good which it was formed to beſtow: whilſt piety and general benevolence forming the ground-work of each character, the ſuperſtructure would be compleated by the aſſemblage of each ſocial and patriotick virtue, terminating in the nobleſt of them all, the love of their country. Contraſt then, in your thoughts, to this ſtate ſo beneficial to man, and ſo productive of bliſs, the ſituation of that Civil Society (if ſuch a one can be conceived) wherein Religion has no part, and which has been conſtituted without any regard to the ſuperintendence of the Supreme, and the ſlighteſt inſpection will demonſtrably prove the neceſſity of Religion to the welfare of Society.

But (ſays the Objector)* "in vain do you take the "idle and filly pains of building fact on ſpeculation,

* Bayle—Penſées diverſes, ecrites à un Docteur de Sorbonne, &c. And, Continuation des Penſées diverſes, &c.

government

" government on abſtract reaſoning, and of buttreſſing
" the crazy fabrick withthe unreal ſupport of imaginary
" circumſtances. For, if we lay aſide exaggerated
" repreſentations, and neglect ſuch magnified accounts
" of human happineſs as the poets of old were alone
" juſtifiable in giving in their elegant fiction of a
" golden age, whether we rely on ſound reaſon, or
" (more properly in the preſent caſe) attend to the
" teſtimony of experience, the neceſſity you contend
" for by no means appears. For granting that Society
" is eſſential to the happineſs of man, a conceſſion
" which, however, might juſtly be conteſted, yet it is
" evident from the former, that Religion is not
" neceſſary for attaining its ends; as Atheiſts may
" arrive at the knowledge of morality, and act
" accordingly, and ſo this much vaunted neceſſity
" vaniſhes at once, for Religion is, confeſſedly, only
" neceſſary as it ſupports morality: as the deſire of glory,
" praiſe, and reputation would be more than ſuffi-
" cient to counterbalance its want; and even giving
" up theſe certain truths, as the principles of Atheiſts
" in Society might be perfectly harmleſs, ſince it is
" manifeſt that men do not act according to their
" principles. A fact which the Religioniſt can not

have

" have the effrontery to deny, without he expects, " (as indeed he uſually does) that his aſſertions ſhould " paſs current againſt the conſtant tide of daily obſer- " vation, or that facts which he is ready enough to " urge in his favour ſhould be toally neglected when " they contravert his poſitions.

" But if ſtill obſtinate in errour, he muſt have, what " thus appears from ſpeculative reaſon juſt and true " confirmed by the deciſive teſtimony of fact, we, " (continues the Opponent) ſhall find our principles " not, like thoſe of the religious dreamer, contradicted " by the uniform courſe of human actions, but " ſupported by that unerring guide in political " reſearches, ſteady experience. Both individuals " and whole nations pour in to corroborate theſe " principles: the Epicurean and Stratonic philoſopher " eſtabliſhing them by the purity of their lives, and " many ſavage tribes undebauched by the curſe of " civilization, confirming them by the innocency of " their manners."

Thus triumphantly proceeds the Objector to what has been advanced in the preceding pages, carefully compenſating

compenſating for his deficiency in argument by peremptorineſs of aſſertion; and ſupporting the weakneſs of his logick by the keenneſs of his invective. Now in anſwer to what he is pleaſed to advance as ſound reaſon, the inſulted *Religioniſt* directly replies, that his firſt poſition is evidently falſe, as Atheiſts can not attain to the knowledge of the morality of actions, in the ſtrict and proper ſenſe of the words; ſince by excluding the will of a ſuperiour, the only legitimate ſource of obligation, they are reduced to found it on principles either weak or fantaſtical, and ſo at once lay the axe to the root of all morality.

For, abſtracting from will, no foundation for it have they left but what is termed the eſſential differences of things, and the moral ſenſe or inſtinct: principles which poſſibly might operate on the ſpeculative and thoughtful, but which are utterly incapable of influencing the great body of mankind; the one requiring deep meditation to eſtabliſh its force, and the other careful cultivation to enſure its growth and prevent the luxuriance of its branches. And though for the efficacy of the moral ſenſe in this caſe it is violently contended, let the uncorrupted voice of

hiſtory tell how apt it has been to miſtake, how prone to miſlead: and, if ſo, how inſufficient a principle it muſt be to form the orignal cauſe of duty, obligation, and morality.

Seemingly conſcious however that his firſt poſt is untenable, the Objector ſhifts his ground, and from the deſire of glory, praiſe, and reputation ſeeks for that ſupport to Society which he will not allow Religion to afford. But how poor an aid this deſire would bring we may eaſily determine, by obſerving how frequently glory and praiſe are acquired even by ſplendid vices: and that at all times the fair ſemblance of virtue will as certainly enſure their acquiſition as its ſincereſt practice; and in truth, among men, who can not penetrate into the motives of action, it juſtly ought to have this effect. So that this famed ſupport in reality might, and, conſidering the depravity of the human heart, in moſt caſes would be the cauſe of cunning, its low mimic, rather than of wiſdom, of hypocriſy rather than of virtue: and, as it manifeſtly would influence only thoſe actions expoſed to the obſervation of the world, the whole body of ſecret crimes and private vices, which ſo materially affect

affect ſocial happineſs, remain without a curb, reſtriction, or confinement.

But, as both the former principles are at length gratuitouſly given up, it ſeems the leſs neceſſary to engage in their confutation; let us then examine whether the third argument, drawn from the inconſiſtency of mens actions with their avowed principles, is of ſufficient ſtrength to ſupport the weakneſs of the others. And here we immediately join iſſue as to the fact, and readily grant, what we as ſincerely lament, that men do not act according to their principles. Yet ſince the cauſes of this fact are notoriouſly the violence of the paſſions, and the force of the irregular appetites, which are diametrically oppoſite to the principles of the man of Religion, but perfectly conſiſtent with the Atheiſt's creed, no abſtruſe enquiries will be requiſite to prove that this laſt argument, when duly weighed, will be found light in the balance. A man, in general well convinced of the great truths of Religion, and of the ſuperintendence of that awful Being, who pervades all creation by his virtue, and governs it by his providence, may often, when agitated by various paſſions, and allured by various temptaions,

tations, act contrary to thoſe principles of rectitude which that conviction muſt imprint: and which though deciſive to his reaſon, are not ſo to his appetites and paſſions. Whilſt the Atheiſt's principles giving a free licence to the indulgence of theſe appetites enſure a conformity to their ſuggeſtions. Thus the force of contracted habits, and the ruling paſſions of the heart, combining with the ſpeculative principles of the individual, would quickly introduce ſuch a ſtate of moral depravation as would render Society indeed the curſe of human life. Difficulties, diſtreſſes, and dangers impending on all ſides would ſoon compel the ſtate to purſue its greateſt intereſt and its greateſt duty, by flying from the empty deluſions and vain ſubtilities of vice to the arms of Religion, which impregnated with the ſeeds of benevolence could alone raiſe the ſentiments, and reform the manners of the people, re-infuſing that ſpirit of morality, whithout which Civil Society can not be ſupported.

But experience, it ſeems, contradicts, and entirely ſubverts our reaſoning, and proves beyond a doubt how harmleſs irreligon may be to the cauſe of Society;

Society: Philoſophers and Savages unite their teſtimonies, and irrefragably prove the falſhood of our ſpeculations. As our buſineſs is to enquire into the effects of irreligion, not on a few individuals, but on the whole maſs of the community, the evidence of theſe Philoſophers is of very little moment; ſince the pride of pretended wiſdom, affectation of ſingularity, or the luſt of praiſe and reputation, might impel them to obſerve a decency and decorum of character, which it would be ridiculous to expect, from the ſame cauſes, ſhould influence the generality of a nation. And ſince, notwithſtanding the learned labours of the miſſionaries of vice, no people has ever yet ſhook off all regard to a Deity, and to the conſequent hopes and fears from thence ariſing, we may juſtly attribute that purity of life ſo much celebrated in theſe Atheiſtical Sages to the ambitious deſire of propagating their opinions: a deſire not to be gratified but by ſpreading abroad high notions of their ſanctity and wiſdom, and inſinuating that their *tenets* were rather ſublime ſubjects of diſquiſition in ſpeculative philoſophy, than practical principles of active life.

The philoſophic teſtimony of Epicurean and Stratonic Atheiſts thus appearing of no weight, we have ſtill to examine the evidence of thoſe Savage Tribes whoſe blameleſs manners are held forth to admiration, and their virtuous demeanour ſo much relied on, as to render them examples of deciſive authority in the preſent inquiry. And here, allowing the reality of the exiſtence of theſe innocent Savages (which ſurely is a fact more than problematical) as they are aſſerted to be in an uncivilized ſtate, an eaſy account of their virtues offers itſelf to our view. Their innocence originates from the abſence of temptation. For where the progreſs of Society has made ſmall advances, the real wants of man are alike few and eaſily relieved; whilſt imaginary wants have not even an exiſtence. Hence temptation is deprived of her moſt powerful auxiliary, and the allurements of paſſion repreſſed and controuled. An apparent tranquility may from theſe cauſes overſpread the community, whoſe ſtagnation of vice is willfully miſtaken for the calm of virtue. Whereas when civilization is perfected and Society refined, from the arts being cultivated our wants become numerous, and our appetites proportionably ſtrong.

The

The ſimple calls of nature which alone had, formerly, demanded gratification are now ſcarce audible amidſt the clamour of imaginary wants, inceſſantly preſſing for indulgence; which, as they are innumerable, unreaſonable, and often unnatural, it is impoſſible to ſate, and nearly as impoſſible to ſubdue. The pride of ambition, the rage of diſſipation, the rapacity of luxury, and the voluptuous ſeductions of pleaſure invigorate deſire, inflame paſſion, allure, enſnare, and entrap the human mind; which thus attacked from without, and betrayed from within, muſt ſoon (without ſuperiour aid) yield itſelf up to their combined efforts. The more Society is improved the more violent are theſe wants, every addition to the arts of life affording them new excitements; whilſt the difficulty of acquiring the means of their indulgence is hourly encreaſed by their unlimited nature, and the like boundleſs deſires of each other individual.

Into ſuch a ſtate of Society, ſo poliſhed, or (if you pleaſe) ſo debauched, introduce your Savage Tribes whoſe virtuous innocence is ſaid clearly to prove the force of private ſentiment, independent of Religion;

Religion; and need we obſerve what would be the conſequence? New appetites created, new paſſions excited, new deſires rouſed, urge on to their gratification the untutored ſon of the wild; example and the general practice ſeem to juſtify ſubmiſſion to their calls; moral fitneſſes and unfitneſſes, moral ſenſe or inſtinct alone oppoſe their feeble barriers: and let common ſenſe tell how feeble they would prove. Not even the credulity of irreligion itſelf can affect to believe but that their virtues would melt away before the heat of ſuch temptations; and incontrovertibly prove the neceſſity of ſuperiour principles and ſuperiour motives, in order to reſtrain the impetuous paſſions of man in Society.

Since then it appears that the objections urged againſt the neceſſity of Religion are thus weak and nugatory, we ſeem the more fully juſtifiable in aſſerting that neceſſity; nor do I conceive what can be further urged againſt us, unleſs it be that its influence is not real, but merely imaginary; and that it is an abſurditv of the firſt magnitude to ſtrenuouſly contend for a principle which (though poſſibly it might be uſeful, was it real) evidently has no effect. That

the

the vices and crimes in Civil Societies pretending to Religion, are as atrocious and common as the moſt exuberant imagination could conceive them to be, had Religion no part in the conſtitution of the ſtate. And that they who, by the pompous jargon of articulated air, endeavour to raiſe ſuch a learned miſt on this occaſion, do it only in order to impoſe on the ſenſes, and miſlead the underſtandings of thoſe who are weak enough to truſt them.

To this objection, urged with whatever force, and relied on with whatever confidence, we reply, that the fact ſo confidently aſſerted, is falſe, as we have already in part attempted to prove; ſince Society could not exiſt, was this high coloured repreſentation true, and that, though we pretend not to deny or diſguiſe the vices which disfigure Civil Society, yet as its ends are, in a good meaſure, attained in every country where it has arrived at any degree of perfection, we can not but attribute the attainment of theſe ends to the influence of Religion; ſince every other cauſe has on examination been found ineffectual for that purpoſe.

But not to rely ſolely on aſſertions, however ſtrong, there is one ſtriking circumſtance which muſt put its powerful efficacy beyond the reach of any reaſonable doubt: that every people, antient or modern, has flouriſhed or declined in proportion as they venerated or contemned the practice of ſound Religon. If then its cultivation has ever produced ſecurity and happineſs; if its neglect has entailed weakneſs and miſery on the ſtate; the argument ſeems brought within a narrow compaſs. For ſhould the influence of Religious principles be ideal, as is ſuggeſted, their contempt could never ſurely have cauſed any material miſchief: if their operation had no effect, their deſtruction muſt have been innoxious. Let then the page of hiſtory be appealed to (and to it we confidently appeal) to eſtabliſh the fact: review the records of antiquity, ſcrutinize the annals of ages, mark their uniform language: and as arguments from experience are the favourites of our Opponents, let the experience of all paſt time finally decide between us.

To conclude againſt the influence of Religion, becauſe it has not produced all the good of which it is capable, is obviouſly unreaſonable, as the very ſame mode

mode of argument would equally conclude againſt the influence of reaſon itſelf, or of any other principle of human conduct. The concluſion, warranted by truth and juſtice, to be drawn in this caſe is directly the contrary, and entirely conformable to the principles by us advanced; that if Religion is now able to aid the cauſe of Society ſo materially, notwithſtanding the impediments which it receives from the paſſions and appetites of men, and the irregular and uncertain impulſes of the human heart; how powerful would be its ſupport! how effectual its aſſiſtance! were theſe lets and hindrances removed, and it ſuffered to produce its genuine fruits, of ſweetening the ſpirits, correcting the paſſions, and mortifying thoſe affections which cauſe enmity, ſtrife and diviſion.

Being thus excellently framed to ſtrengthen and perfect Civil Society, which the wants of our kind require, and the neceſſity of our nature enforces: appearing, on examination, ſuperiour to the cavils of ſophiſm, and invincible by the darts of perverted reaſon, which only tend to manifeſt its utility, to diſplay its pre-eminence: the poſition, which we have all along endeavoured to eſtabliſh, comes forth from

from the trial with additional evidence, and impreſſes on the mind the ampleſt conviction of its truth. The neceſſity of Religion to the welfare of Society, and its influence thereon, are thus evinced both by reaſon and experience, nor can now be denied without folly and effrontery: whilſt the divine wiſdom and goodneſs, in providing for the happineſs of man, are freed from all imputation, they having moſt wonderfully united his mightieſt intereſt with his moſt important duty.

We enter not here into an examination how far any particular ſyſtem of Religion may affect ſocial happineſs; nor do we mean to inſtitute any compariſon of the relative tendency of the various modes of faith which, at different times and different places, have prevailed, or at preſent prevail, throughout the earth: ſuch examination and compariſon, however entertaining or improving, not neceſſarily appertaining to our ſubject. Yet it may not, in general, be uſeleſs to obſerve that where purity of principle and rectitude of conduct are indiſpenſably required, as the only means of pleaſing the common Father of all, and where univerſal benevolence

benevolence is the moſt prominent feature of any Religious Syſtem, that Syſtem muſt prove moſt friendly to the publick welfare. Cavillers may object, and minute Philoſophers may nibble at particular parts, or *ſuppoſed* parts, of its doctrines and duties: but theſe circumſtances will ever determine the opinion of thoſe who have ſufficient expanſion of mind to comprehend, and ſufficient goodneſs of heart to love, a whole; nor will the intelligent want any other criterion whereby to determine their judgment.

Tedious as this diſquiſition has been, and needleſsly protracted as, perhaps, by ſome it may be thought, the Authour laments not the hours ſpent in the inquiry: and, let the ſucceſs of his labours be what it may, he has no cauſe to regret his employment who is conſcious of having endeavoured, with whatever abilities, to ſupport the cauſe of truth, of reaſon, and of virtue.

F I N I S.

BRITISH MUSEUM
3 JU 71